

EXPOSITION INTERNATIONALE
DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS
ET INDUSTRIELS MODERNES
& DES ARTS ET TECHNIQUES
DANS LA VIE MODERNE

Kasper AKHØJ
Martí ANSON
Maria LOBODA
Charlotte MOTH
Sarah ORTMEYER

Curated by Latitudes

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The *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes & des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* (International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts & Art and Technology in Modern Life) presents projects by five contemporary visual artists which engage with specific instances of modernity as represented through industrial or domestic design. A world-famous tower, a street, a range of furniture, a modular display system, and textile patterns, have been metaphorically taken apart before being reconstituted, sometimes literally, through artistic practices and personal affiliations which incorporate historical research, travel, tribute and scenography, for example.

Running counter to the modernist spirit of rationality, clarity and empiricism, the artists' often playful engagements deal with anecdotal, subjective, and frequently deliberately imprecise applications. Their projects engage with disciplines traditionally outside of the domain of the visual arts, and in doing so they invite a renegotiation of a design's intended use, and an interest in the point at which apparent aesthetic surplus or redundancy modifies or reconstructs an object's meaning or efficacy. The artists' works furthermore operate with a heightened awareness or awkwardness of their being exhibited (and alongside a synthesized 'period' exhibition title taken from conjoining the names of the Paris Worlds' Fairs from 1925 and 1937). Theatricality and commercial or museological display strategies are the restraints and releases, or the actual subject, of the artists' articulations.

How does the reproducibility, as well as the attribution or anonymity, of authored and to various degrees canonical or generic designs within a public-facing world translate into a personal or private practice? What kind of relationship can be established between a marginal or marginalized maker and a contemporary artist; and to what extent can design, the arts or art exceed and escape both? What is at stake in reconnecting with the values of progressive modernity as a memory or a mythology?

GROUND FLOOR

Left-hand room

During the early 1960s in Mataró, Spain, Joaquim Anson (the father of artist Martí ANSON) developed a range of furniture inspired by modern designs with the aim of offering an affordable and fashionable custom-made range for a growing Catalan middle class who could not afford the 'real' objects. Yet Anson did not consider himself a designer and he worked inconspicuously providing functional and versatile solutions for his family, friends and clients. His design repertoire included lounge chairs, occasional tables, modular shelves, high chairs, and even toys, and was mostly produced in the light wood known locally as *flanda* (Flanders pine). Yet Anson stopped producing a decade later as he felt the initiative had become too commercially oriented and that the close relationship with his customers had begun to wane. Forty years on, Martí Anson has undertaken extensive research to recuperate this social service project of his father (who kept little documentation of his work) and has begun to produce furniture again under the company name JOAQUIMANDSON. This is the rediscovered designs' first public exhibition; a range of new prototypes is presented alongside a 1960s lamp by Catalan designer Miguel Milà which has been lent for the occasion, and posters documenting the history of the furniture company.

Right-hand room

Charlotte MOTH presents a film comprised of a sequence of black-and-white photographs and nine photographic prints (**entrance hall**) under the titles *The Absent Forms* and *The Protagonists* respectively. Reflective, translucent and opaque panels, as well as objects including balls and a plant, become protagonists in a series of illuminated crepuscular and nocturnal scenes which take place on a tree lined cul-de-sac. The remarkable modernist buildings of the Paris street – designed as a totality by the little-known architect Robert Mallet-Stevens and constructed in 1926–27 – become like a stage set for the dramatisation of the mechanics of the photographic image, and reprise the street’s scenic role in a number of film productions in which Mallet-Stevens collaborated, including the Josephine Baker vehicle *La sirène des tropiques* (1927). Textual fragments written in response to Man Ray’s 1929 film *Les Mystères du Château de Dé* (which uses a Mallet-Stevens-designed villa as a set) intercut the images, while the soundtrack comprises a recording of an improvised drumming session performed in response to the work by the artist Sean Dower.

FIRST FLOOR

Alcove and left-hand room

Sarah ORTMEYER pays homage to the universal symbol and the iconographic myth that is the Eiffel Tower and the structure’s often-forgotten original engineer, Maurice Koechlin. *VITRINE MAURICE* (2011) consists of a series of objects and furnishings – all taken from an undisclosed room – which have been laid out in similar fashion to the ‘Collection Yves Saint Laurent et Pierre Bergé’ auction in 2009. The items comprise a range of tacit motifs and abstract invocations of the Eiffel Tower’s singularly monumental shape and history. This icon of Paris and cypher of modernity appears through a series of triangular objects, patterns, formal echoes, and refrains that one could barely track in the original room. They include the DKR2 – Charles Eames’ ‘Eiffel Tower’ chair (which mimics its namesake with a darkly colored base and lightly bronzed top), as well fabric and carpet motifs. Despite Gustave Eiffel’s defense of the Tower as a utilitarian object, its glamorous uselessness has proved irresistible to the imagination and ensures that, as Roland Barthes once put it, “the Tower attracts meaning the way a lightning rod attracts thunderbolts”.

Right-hand room

Kasper AKHØJ presents a slideshow which comprises the latest chapter in his ongoing research into the display system *Abstracta*, originally designed by the Danish architect and designer Poul Cadovious in the 1960s for a world’s fair. Comprising bright welded steel tubing with star-shaped joints commonly supporting glass or wooden panels, the modules were first encountered by Akhøj in department stores and museums in the former Yugoslavia. His subsequent investigations follow the traces of its imitation and mass production in China in the 1970s, its subsequent local manufacture across communist Eastern Europe, its recent patenting by a U.S. trade show systems company, its presence in the collection of MoMA, New York, as well as an encounter with *Abstracta*’s now elderly designer who was unaware of the ideological adult life of his creation. In Akhøj’s (or rather, ‘*Abstracta*’s) travelogue, what appears to be a purely practical system, conceived with reproducibility, easy assembly and storage, and seemingly endless geometric expansion in mind, finds itself forming the shapes of an intriguing and elegantly obsessive narrative.

WUNDERKAMMER

Maria LOBODA presents two printed fabrics inspired by the designs of Sonia Delaunay, Lotte Frömmel-Fochler, Mitzi Friedmann-Otten, and others – or to be more precise, triggered by written descriptions of their geometric textiles. Loboda consulted published texts which try to describe and communicate the energy of these Wiener Werkstätte and Art Déco patterns in words – “vigorous angular forms and overall jagged feel”, “curving arabesques and energetic zig-zigs”, “vaguely explosive motifs”, for example – and then attempted to recreate the designs from what these phrases suggested to her, alongside her memory of such patterns. The artist is fascinated by the nervous, violent and dynamic energy of the interior decoration associated with the early-20th-Century avant-garde and how it tried to create a psychological state of electric action for the modern home and its inhabitants. The accompanying slideshow *Il Lavoro (The Art of Memory)* (2010) plays with continuity errors in cinema and is based on a film still from the short film *Il Lavoro* (1962) by Luchino Visconti. A woman is seen posing next to an open book with changing illustrations of Sonia Delaunay’s geometric designs.